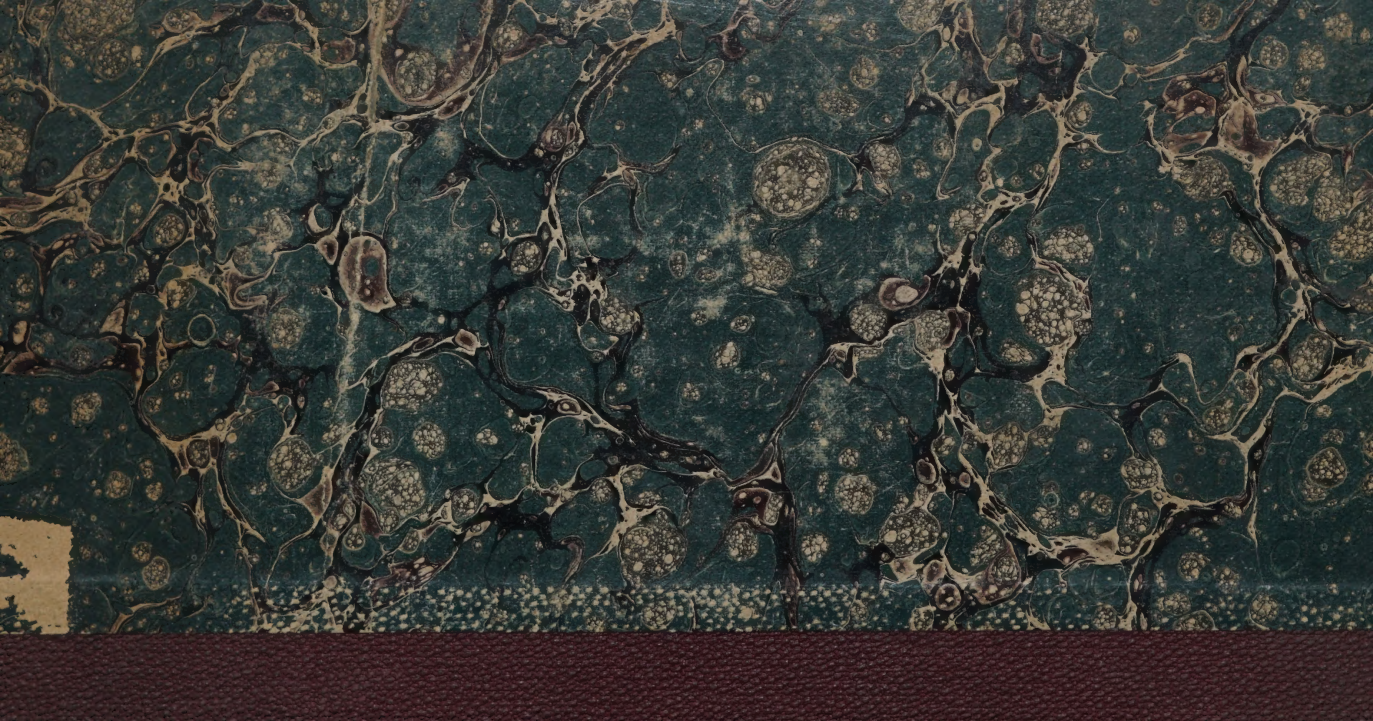

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TO THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

OF THE

UNITED STATES.

4265.120

THE ADDRESS

OF THE

BELFAST

ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

BELFAST:

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MDCCCXLI.

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William Lloyd Garrison

July 8, 1899.

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BELFAST ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

BRETHREN, professors of the same faith with ourselves, will you suffer the word of exhortation, which we feel ourselves bound to address to you, on the all-important and engrossing subject of Slavery? It has been widely circulated, and is generally believed, throughout Britain, that more than two millions of our fellow-creatures are enduring the wrongs of Slavery in your Southern states—that the perpetrators of these wrongs are professing Christians—that the Churches of America have, almost universally, connived at this gross outrage on justice and religion—and that, in some instances, instead of exercising the highest censures of the Church, as was their duty to do, they have cast the shield of their protection over the unrighteous dealer in slaves. There may, no doubt, be noble exceptions; we hope there are many, and to such our address is not directed; but the evidence is too plain and abundant to forbid

the conclusion, that Slavery in the United States has found its most secure refuge in the Church; and therefore do we feel ourselves imperatively called upon to address our remonstrance to our brethren in America, and to do so upon the high authority of apostolic command—"Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin."

Surely it is only "the deceitfulness of sin" that can account for the toleration of Slavery by a Church of Christ. It is a flagrant violation of the laws of revelation and the principles of Christianity. If it is argued that Slavery was permitted under the legislation of Moses, we reply that it was permitted in the same way that polygamy was permitted, because of the hardness of the hearts of the people, but both were manifestly and equally contrary to the first principles of the law of Moses. Nor let it be said, that examples of Slavery were found in the early Christian Churches, for while it is admitted that such did exist, they were ever contrary to Christianity, and they were tolerated only until the purifying principles of Christianity should operate to cast them out of the Church. Who would undertake to reconcile Slavery with that one fundamental law of the Gospel, "whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them?" They are utterly incompatible and subversive of one another. The early teachers of Christianity did not introduce the changes which it contemplated hastily and violently. Their grand aim was to gain a lodgment for the truth of the Gospel in the heart, and

that was left to exercise its silent, but sure and gradual influence on the customs and practices of mankind. Among other evils, Slavery was thus destined to destruction. Yet neither under the law of Moses, nor in apostolic times, did any such Slavery exist as is now found in the Southern states of North America, nor could the toleration of the one justify the encouragement of the other. Where shall a passage be found in the Scriptures to justify the enactment of a law forbidding a slave to be taught the art of reading, making it criminal to instruct him in religious knowledge, and leaving him to the caprice of a cruel taskmaster, to employ him, or punish him, as he will? The essence of modern Slavery consists in constituting a right of property in man, but such Slavery is not found in the Scriptures, nor can it be justified by them. Suppose that when Paul sent back Onesimus to Philemon, his master had treated him as a runaway slave would now be treated in America, how would Paul have regarded Philemon? True, he sent him back, but it was not to be punished as a criminal, or treated as a slave, but that Philemon might have the opportunity of doing cheerfully, what Paul, and the religion which he preached, required him to do. Had Philemon treated Onesimus with severity, or made such laws for his future conduct as are now made in America for the government of the slave, Paul would have disowned him, as a disciple of Jesus, and denied him the privileges of Christian fellowship. This is precisely what the Churches of America should now do towards the traders in Slavery. The whole system

is in manifest contradiction to the religion of Jesus; and while they voluntarily continue to be part and parcel of it, they should not be permitted to be part and parcel of the brotherhood of believers.

It is peculiarly criminal, in the Churches of *America*, to hold the protection of their shield over the abominations of Slavery. American independence is the basis and boast of their national constitution. We need not remind you, that one of the fundamental principles of the union was, a condemnation of Slavery. Drinking at this fountain, the national character has become signalized by an unconquerable love of liberty. We have had many opportunities of remarking, that when your eloquent men have visited our country, they have been fond to speak of America, as "the land of the brave, and the home of the free." It was to you, therefore, above all people, we should have been disposed, in our first movements for the assertion of equal laws and rights, to have looked for sympathy and succour. The idea of an American citizen would have encouraged us to expect a hearty co-operation, and when to this we added an American Christian, we could not have imagined the possibility of indifference in the cause of liberty. What shall we say when we find whole Churches not only indifferent, but abetting the cause of Slavery? American independence, trampling on the rights of two millions of her people! American Churches, holding their peace, while the bodies of men are enslaved, and their souls denied the bread of life that came down from heaven! American Christians, buying, and

selling, and flogging their fellow-men, their fellow-Christians! "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph." America, but especially the Church of America, is disgraced for ever, if she clear not her escutcheon of the foul blot of Slavery; and, let her be assured, that, while the voice of the civilized world shall condemn her, the judgments of Jehovah will speedily overtake her. Her Churches would do well to enquire into her commercial and public calamities. We have felt, ourselves, the shock of the mighty convulsion that has made your country heave, as though she were in the pangs of dissolution. "Consider your ways." These judgments were at their height when your public appearances against the liberty of the slave were at their height. "Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Let the Churches of America repent—let them call upon the nation to repent, in dust and ashes, for blood is found in their skirts! The Church is the security of society, and if she be faithful in her testimony and discipline, God will spare the country, for her sake, and establish her interests in righteousness.

How can the Churches of America endure to think that their country is almost alone among the civilized nations of the earth, in openly, and nationally, encouraging Slavery? Our own country was once deep in criminality, but she has manifested repentance, by her long, and arduous, and expensive efforts

for the extinction of Slavery. She is now joined by France, and Spain, and Portugal, and other European nations. All countries are uniting to cry sin and shame upon the accursed traffic in human flesh —and shall America stand alone? and shall the Churches of America screen the offender? Would that she were only neutral: but our hearts have been afflicted to observe the treatment endured at your own hands, by a noble band of martyrs and confessors, among yourselves—we have listened, with agony and woe, to their recitals of their own dangers, and the sufferings of the enslaved, whose cause they espoused—we have read, with astonishment and grief, that blood has often been shed because the voice of religion was lifted up in the cause of humanity—and these heralds of mercy have assured us, that the stronghold of Slavery is now in the Churches. Let the Churches do their duty, and cast out of their communion those who have polluted it by bringing into them the stain of blood; let them vindicate their own character, by bringing the offenders to punishment; and soon may the Churches of America bring the whole nation to see and act aright upon the question of Slavery. Oh! that it may soon be found in its right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus. Never rest until you find your beloved country joined in a holy league with our own and the other nations of the earth to crush the vile demon of Slavery wholly and for ever.

You are, no doubt, aware that the Christians of Britain have felt themselves called upon to enter into a solemn compact to refuse the privileges of

Christian fellowship to any members of your Churches who may be participators in the crime of Slavery, either by practising it themselves, or conniving at it in others. Be assured this was a resolution not hastily formed ;—it was adopted after long, patient, prayerful, and painful consideration. But it appeared to us, that the Churches of America had fallen under a deep slumber, and that decided measures were necessary to awaken them to a just sense of their danger and duty. In taking such a step, we felt ourselves constrained by a strong sense of duty. As we could not admit to our communion a member of our own Churches, who was found to be a participator in the sin of Slavery, it was only consistent that the same rule should be extended to all others. Fondly do we hope that this line of separation shall soon be removed—we cannot give you the right hand of fellowship across it—it must be cut away, and your hand must do it. Oh ! let brethren be no longer separated. We would act an unworthy and injurious part, did we suffer sin upon our brother. God is our witness, that, in what we have done, we have felt the force only of that command—"Be not partaker of other mens sins, keep thyself pure." We have often read of your revivals; we have had our souls refreshed and strengthened by the reports of them; we have been at pains to circulate the knowledge of them, but what are we to say or do now? Were we to speak of them to the people at large, they would mock us, and say, revivals in America ! revivals, and Slavery ! The Slavery of America has brought contempt and scorn

upon her revivals. Will you permit the good work of the Lord to be thus evil spoken of? Were you not even convinced of the sinfulness of Slavery itself, would it not be your duty to destroy it, as a hinderance to the cause and honor of Christ? But have not your revivals been declining? We have not heard of them lately, as we were accustomed to do, in years that are gone by. Blessed be God we are becoming more familiar with them at home, and it was from America this live coal was brought at first to kindle the fire of our altars. And must we now stand in the attitude of protesting against the sins of our teachers? Must we refuse our fellowship to those from whom we hoped to derive increasing benefit? Bitterly have we learned the lesson, "cease from man." And earnestly do we entreat you to lift up your voices like a trumpet, to show the people their transgressions, and testify against their sins; then shall the work of the Lord again be revived among you—we shall hear of your prosperity, rejoice in your joys, and become partakers of your blessings.

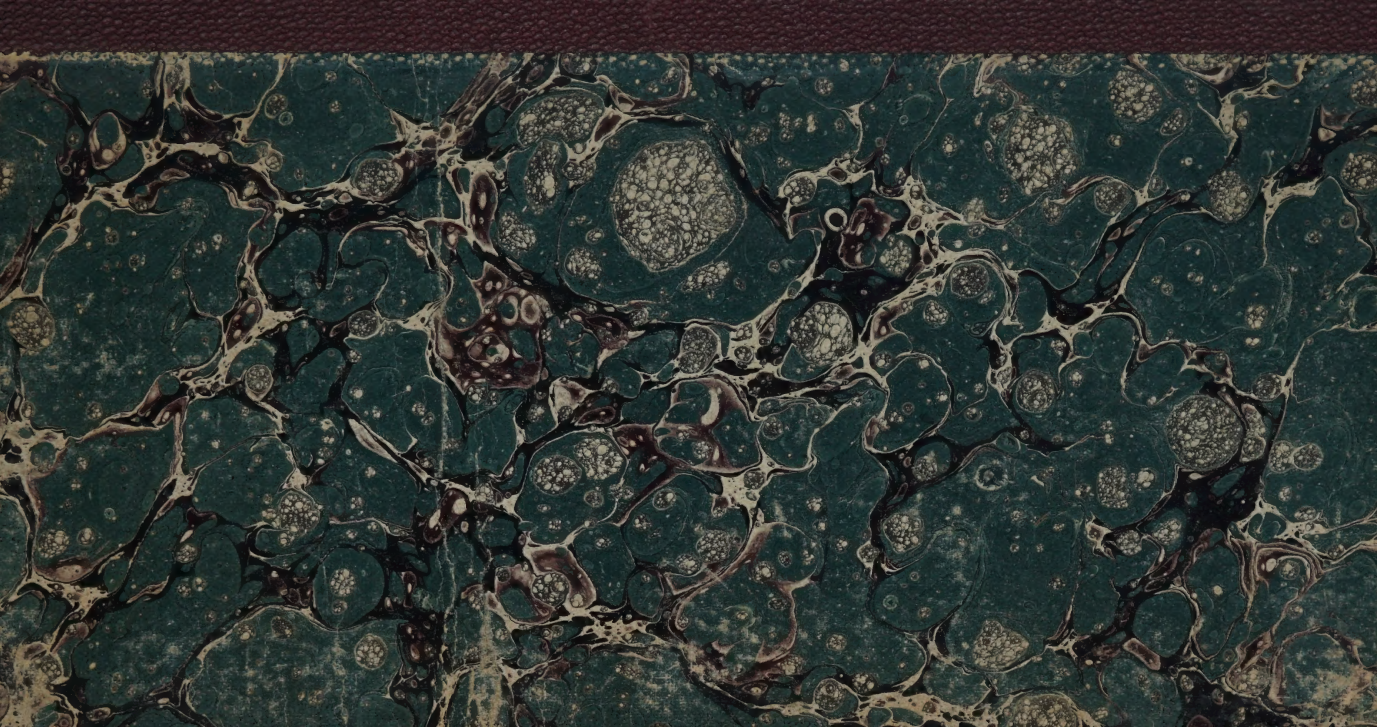
Consider, that while Slavery is tolerated in America, you are judged, by all the other nations of the earth, to be the abettor of the Slave-trade itself, especially while the humiliating and disgraceful traffic of an internal Slave-trade is known to prevail, to a great extent, among yourselves. Against this charge you perhaps exclaim with horror; yet, rest assured, it is thus your conduct is viewed by others. It is not easy to distinguish between Slavery and the Slave-trade, so as to excul-

pate the one, and condemn the other; the one is dependant on the other; destroy either and you destroy both; maintain the one and you uphold the other; they are one and the same sin in the sight of God. Yet, under the law of Moses, it was ordained, that "he who stealeth a man shall surely be put to death." By encouraging Slavery, we must express our solemn conviction that the Churches of America are participators in the enormities of the Slave-trade. And, oh! when you think of these—the capture of the slave—torn from his family in the dead of night—manacled and marched some hundred miles, till the galling fetters wear the flesh from his bones—confined on the sea shore, in a loathsome dungeon, till an opportunity for his shipment may arise—packed in the narrow hold of the crowded, fetid, suffocating slave-ship—imprisoned, under agonies of body and tortures of mind, which the robust only can survive—when landed, a living man, hawked to the market-place, and sold to the highest bidder—then hurried away, to drag out a miserable existence, which, the longer it is endured, is the more intolerable!—Oh! can it be, that, by any part of your conduct, you should be accounted participators in such deeds as these. Yes, the voice of Europe now makes this charge against the Churches of America; they blame you, as encouragers of the Slave-trade, while you tolerate Slavery. Even were the charge unjust, and the inference wrong, you should weigh it carefully: but we are constrained to join in this accusation; and we say, calmly and advisedly, that, while you do not abolish Slavery at home, you can bear no

consistent and honourable testimony against the Slave-trade.

Upon a great moral and religious question, such as this is, Christians should give no uncertain sound. You should not leave it in the power, even of your enemies, to mistake your views. There was no obscurity in the views of prophets, and apostles, and Jesus Christ: hear their words, and act upon them, and you shall fully meet the purpose of our remonstrance—"Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burden, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bound, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Signed, in the name, and on behalf, of the Belfast Auxiliary to the BRITISH AND FOREIGN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY—

JAMES MORGAN, Chairman,

JAMES STANDFIELD, } Secretaries.
F A. CALDER, }